

Developing Leadership Capacity in New Mexico
Presentation to the Legislative Finance Committee
18 July 2013

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Children attending chronically underperforming schools in America cannot wait. They require school leaders who understand the urgency for change and possess the competencies and training to lead that change. Even though the nation's lowest-performing schools are often thought to be large high schools located in big cities, the fact is that of our lowest-performing schools—particularly high schools—more than half are located outside urban areas (21% are rural and 19% are suburban). Neither are all of these schools large (22% are schools of 400 or fewer students; and 29% are schools with between 400 and 1,000 students). The more revealing statistic, particularly as it applies to high schools, is that three-quarters of the total enrollment of the nation's lowest-performing schools are students of color, and eighty-four percent are considered to be high poverty (http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/rural_locales.asp).

As is the case across the nation, New Mexico's lowest-performing schools include elementary, middle, and high schools; and these are widely distributed throughout the State. They vary greatly in size and locale but their common characteristic is the prevalence of poor and minority students. New Mexico's students face tremendous challenges, yet there *are* exceptional school leaders who are finding ways to deliver extraordinary educational opportunities to these children. By leveraging their leadership capacities and training, these principals are developing ways to focus on ensuring academic success, driving school

improvement, and building school community—in short, they are finding ways to turn around the State’s low-performing schools.

Who Are These Turnaround Leaders?

Research regarding the direct measure of successful leadership in schools, while increasingly abundant, too often remains inconclusive. It is widely accepted by scholars, for example, that measuring the impact of the principal solely in terms of student academic achievement is insufficient (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Pitner, 1988). Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom, (2004) place the effects of leadership in most schools at 25 percent. Conversely, in school turnarounds, the impact of the principal is thought to be far more fundamental to their success: “It is almost unheard of for turnarounds to occur without a special breed of leader at the helm...” (Steiner & Hassel, 2011; 1).

Just as we find in the managerial literature, a leader who is successful in one school may not be successful in another, for different organizational models may require leaders with different sets of competencies (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Spencer and Spencer (1993) identify one such competency as *achievement*, which includes “setting high performance goals for the organization, prioritizing activities to achieve the highest benefit relative to inputs, and working to meet goals using direct action, staff, and other available resources.” An additional competency for turnaround leaders includes *impact and influence*: “acting with the purpose of affecting the perceptions, thinking and actions of others. It includes empathizing with others and anticipating likely responses to situations, tailoring actions and words to create an intended impact, and giving and withholding information to obtain specific responses” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Public Impact (2007), in a report on organizational improvement, maintains that both of these competencies are required in successful school turnaround principals.

Successful School Turnaround Activities (all turnaround activities herein described derive from Public Impact [2007]. *School turnarounds: A review of the cross-section evidence on dramatic organizational improvement*. Retrieved from <http://www.Centerii.org/survey/downloads/Turnarounds-Color.pdf> and National Network of State School Improvement Leaders [2010] *School Improvement Grant: The Turnaround Model*. <http://www.centerii.org/leaders>).

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1. *Successful Turnaround Leaders Concentrate on Achieving a Few Tangible Wins in Year One.*

“Success can beget success; specifically, the early tangible wins can serve as a catalyst for additional positive change. The early win signals that something is different and that success, however measured, is possible. Examples of quick wins are:

- Improve the physical plant by cleaning up debris and painting walls.
- Ensure that students have required materials and supplies at the beginning of the school year.
- Significantly reduce discipline referrals by altering class transitions schedules.
- Reduce truancy by locking superfluous entrances and communicating to parents that the school day is protected instructional time.”

2. *Implementing Practices to Achieve Goals Even When They Deviate From Norms*

“Examples of these actions include:

- Adjust teachers’ and paraeducators’ schedules to align with late buses to create opportunity for additional one-on-one instructional time.
- Carve out additional time for instruction, either by reallocating the school day or creating additional time beyond the school day.
- Assign assistant principals and instructional assistants working in the main office to work in the classrooms.”

3. *Analysis and Problem-Solving*

- “Collect and personally analyze organizational performance data (turnaround begins with a thorough review of the organization’s strengths and weaknesses).
- Creating an action plan based on data.
- Implement strategies even when they deviate from established organizational practices (require all staff to change, rather than make it optional).
- Make necessary but limited staff replacements, replacing only those staff who cannot or do not make needed changes.
- Funnel more time and money into successful tactics while halting unsuccessful tactics.
- Act in relentless pursuit of goals, rather than touting progress as ultimate success (keep staff focused on end goals).”

4. *Influencing Inside and Outside*

“In successful turnarounds, leaders use their influence to win the support of both staff and external stakeholders for changes the organization needs.

- Communicate a positive vision for future results.
- Help staff personally see and feel the problems their ‘customers’ face.
- Get key influencers to support change.
- Silence change naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes.”

5. *Measuring and Reporting*

- “Successful turnarounds are typically marked by measuring and reporting data frequently and publicly.
- Gather staff in frequent open-air meetings, requiring all involved in decision-making to disclose results and problem solve

Preparation for Turnaround

- “A year of planning is important in turning around a school. Schools that make major staff and leadership changes over a summer often struggle with chaos and poor results in the following year.
- Managers of successful turnarounds tend to implement fewer restructuring strategies, but put them in place early in the turnaround process.
- Focused results during the initial year are important in part to help establish credibility, create momentum for change, and break down resistance.

- Schools undertaking significant school reform appear to have a higher chance of success when the district allows as much freedom as possible from regulations regarding scheduling, transportation, discipline, and curriculum.
- Successful turnaround leaders achieve results by working around rules and seeking approval after their strategy has worked, rather than asking for permission beforehand.
- Districts that experience notably larger gains in academic outcomes focus, among other things, on student achievement and specific goals; set a schedule for defined consequences; focus on the lowest achieving schools; and drive reform into the classroom by establishing their role as guiding, supporting, and improving instruction at the building level.
- Existing resources can support necessary change if they are concentrated on the factors that are most in need of change and offer the biggest possible pay-offs.
- Research suggests that external performance expectations characteristic of current accountability systems alone are insufficient to spur substantial school improvement in many schools.

- During the implementation phase of a turnaround, successful organizations frequently develop a turnaround “campaign” to ensure that restructuring takes place in an environment that is receptive to change.
- During their restructuring efforts, successful schools engage their communities by initiating partnerships with grassroots organizations that, in turn, help parents understand why reform is necessary in their children’s schools.”

The Alliance for Leading and Learning Grant (ALL)

As described in the *Report to the Legislative Finance Committee: Public Education Department: Teacher and Administrator Preparation in New Mexico* (December 5, 2012):

Recent research funded by the Wallace Foundation supports aspects of ALL, including a careful selection process; full-time, semester-long residencies; and follow-up mentoring.” (p.32).

“UNM, APS, and the NMSLI developed this federal grant-funded partnership to improve student success by carefully selecting principal candidates, identifying administrative mentors with records of student success, and matching these mentors with principal candidates. APS administrators co-teach all coursework with university faculty. Co-teachers receive grant-funded stipends, and their instruction enables future principals to connect theory to practice. After coursework, principal candidates complete a semester-long, full-time internship alongside mentor principals. APS provides long-term substitutes to fill the classroom positions of these

principal interns at a cost of \$9,700 per candidate. This approach starkly contrasts other schools of education that have moved toward entirely online internships in which interns complete logs documenting activities while maintaining full-time positions.” (pp. 32-33)

Program rated “high performing” by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation and improvement.

**U.S. Department of Education
Office of Innovation and Improvement
School Leadership Program
“Alliance for Leading and Learning” (ALL)
(FY) 2010**

PROPOSAL ABSTRACT

The intent of this project is to establish a cohesive, comprehensive, and rigorous program that will support school principals, with special emphasis on those serving in high need schools. The program will support principals across their careers, from aspiring to beginning to experienced principals. Partners with the Albuquerque Public Schools in this program will be the University of New Mexico and the New Mexico Leadership Institute. The University will provide an approved preparation and licensure program for aspiring principals as well as longitudinal research tracing the program’s impact on student achievement. The Leadership Institute will collaborate in the creation of professional development models for new and experienced principals and disseminate program strategies and best practices to other districts in the state.

Activities and services provided through the project will include tuition and a sabbatical for aspiring principals to complete a residency program in a high need school. Peer Mentors and on-site coaching for new principals will reinforce the professional development program designed specifically to support them in new positions. Experienced principals will have opportunities to serve as mentors, to participate in Professional Learning Communities, and to receive support for the NBPTS certification process. All activities in this project will focus on what principals must know and do to improve the learning of students.

The outcomes of this project will be the redesign of the University preparation program for aspiring principals and the identification of potential leaders it will prepare. The district will have created a large pool of highly qualified principals to serve in high need schools, and the most effective practices for leadership development will be disseminated across the state. Finally, the most significant outcome will be improved student learning and a narrowing of achievement gaps as school principals serve as the catalyst for change.

Turnaround Leadership for Student Success

U.S. Department of Education

Office of Innovation and Improvement

School Leadership Program

“Turnaround Leadership for Student Success” (TLSS)

(FY) 2013

PROPOSAL ABSTRACT

Children attending chronically underperforming schools do not have another year to wait. They need principals who have a sense of urgency for change and have the skills to lead that positive change. Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) is responding to SLP Invitational Priority One in partnership with the University of New Mexico (UNM) and the New Mexico School Leadership Institute (NMSLI). UNM is bringing together faculty from the College of Education and the Anderson School of Management to partner with APS and NMSLI to design and deliver a cohesive, comprehensive, and rigorous program with two initiatives: (1) train and support a cadre of experienced principals/assistant principals to turnaround focus or priority schools, and (2) train highly qualified aspiring principals to lead schools in need of turnaround.

Initiative One – Training Experienced Principals/Assistant Principals to Turnaround Schools

Experienced principals/assistant principals interested in school turnaround will be invited to apply for our “Turnaround Leadership for Student Success” (TLSS) program and participate in a Behavioral Event Interview (BEI). A carefully screened cohort will be selected to start their turnaround training. They will attend a summer intensive over two consecutive summers and meet throughout the next three school years to receive ongoing training, coaching and support to implement school turnaround while building capacity at their school. Over the life of the grant three cohorts of experienced principals/assistant principals will be selected, trained and supported.

UNM will provide coursework leading to a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Turnaround Leadership for experienced principals and APS and NMSLI will provide ongoing support for turnaround coaches and turnaround principals. In addition, NMSLI will disseminate program strategies and best practices to other districts in the state.

Initiative Two – Training Aspiring Principals to Turnaround Schools

Teacher leaders interested in school turnaround will be invited to apply for our “Turnaround Leadership for Student Success” (TLSS) program. After a thorough selection process, candidates will participate in a basic principal preparation program developed through the SLP ALL Grant. In addition, these candidates will receive an additional semester of internship and coursework specifically in school turnaround leadership provided by UNM.

All components of this project will focus on what principals must know and be able to do to dramatically improve the learning of students. The outcomes of this project will be thirty experienced principals and thirty aspiring principals trained in school turnaround leadership who can lead chronically underperforming schools in a different direction.

Through this grant we will create a cadre of highly qualified turnaround principals and the most effective practices for turnaround leadership development will be disseminated across the state. Finally, the most significant outcome will be improved student learning and a narrowing of achievement gaps as principals serve as the catalyst for dramatic change.

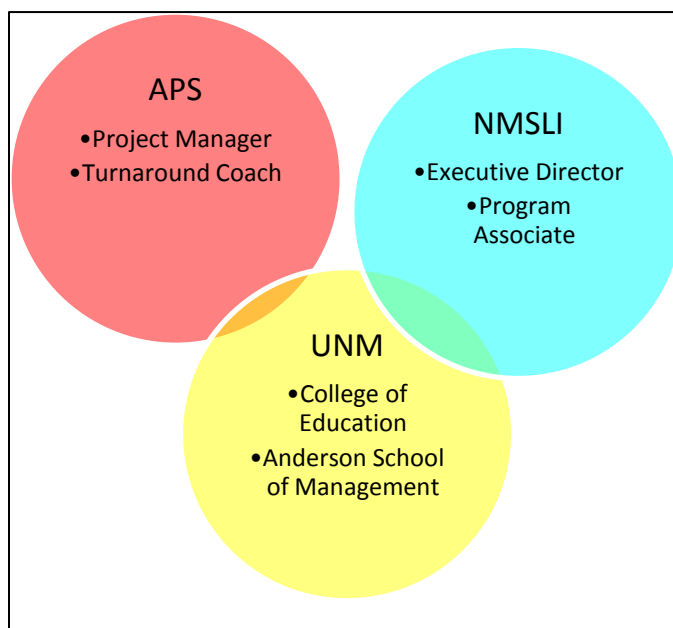


Figure 1

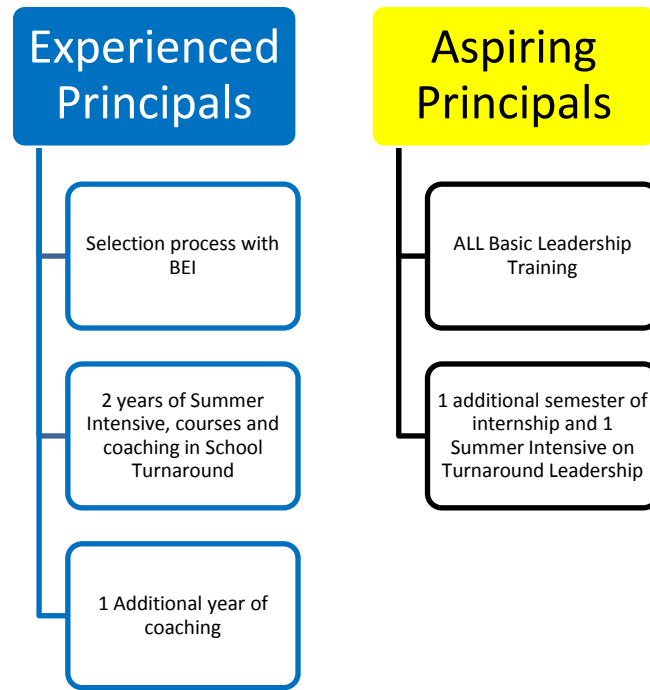


Figure 2

Conclusions

School principals who have met with success throughout their careers often fall short when confronted with the dynamics facing them in turnaround schools. Schools with entrenched cultures of failure require leaders with habits of behavior and motivations often not found in the general pool of candidates. Consequently, leadership programs must train their students to meet the managerial and instructional requirements of school leadership but more fundamentally, they must recruit candidates who possess the competencies required for this bold work. It's not for everyone.

The Turnaround Leadership for Student Success (TLSS) initiative, a collaborative model of leadership preparation between Albuquerque Public Schools, The University of New Mexico (College of Education and Anderson School of Management), and the New Mexico School Leadership Institute responds to this challenge by building on the success of the previous ALL

collaborative partnership work. This grant proposes to recruit candidates with the required competencies and provide them with the training to turn around low-performing schools. Following that initial training, they will work with mentors over a period of two years, in their local schools and districts. TLSS proposes to help districts create the capacity, using data, to identify the challenges present in their schools and communities and to create action plans based on that data.

Endnotes

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